

**ESEA Reauthorization 2015**  
**NEBRASKA POSITION STATEMENT**  
Nebraska Department of Education

The people of Nebraska — through their Constitution, the Nebraska Legislature, the State Board of Education, the Commissioner of Education, and state policymakers — are responsible for designing Nebraska's education system, including providing opportunities for all students to graduate ready for college and career. Local boards of education, administrators, teachers, parents, communities, and students proudly lead the education system's implementation. The Nebraska Department of Education and local school districts also work hard to cultivate a balanced working relationship among federal, state, and local education entities — a relationship built on a support system that benefits all students across Nebraska.

The Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Legislature, and education policy partners worked hand-in-hand over the last several years to build essential systems for supporting school district improvement. Policymakers and practitioners collaborated to develop college and career ready standards, valid and reliable assessments to measure student progress against the standards, and, more recently, developed a balanced state accountability system relying on test scores and graduation rates as well as other valid indicators to monitor school and district performance and to prescribe interventions for persistently low-performing schools.

The State Board of Education believes that further integrating components of accountability, assessment, accreditation, career education, and data use into an aligned system of continuous school improvement and support is imperative for Nebraska's students and to close persistent achievement gaps. The educational success of every Nebraska student is critical to the state's plans for building a vibrant and economically successful future. Given this work, we appreciate Congress' willingness to consider ESEA Reauthorization in view of our unique circumstances and the context in other states. We call on Congress and the Administration to use this opportunity to promote educational equity by moving beyond No Child Left Behind's one-size-fits-all model and instead helping states and districts establish more meaningful and nuanced supports for students served by the nation's lowest performing schools.

Among other changes, the new ESEA should set high expectations for state and local education systems, but allow Nebraska and other states to define strategies for meeting those goals, such as using more sophisticated accountability systems and tailoring interventions to address unique local needs. Currently, states, intermediate agencies, and schools spend an immense amount of time, effort, and money addressing federal regulatory measures that do not fit local circumstances and discourage educational innovation. This problem can be addressed by continuing to hold states and districts accountable for effectively serving all students while also empowering state and local leaders to design and implement innovative strategies for closing or eliminating achievement gaps. Punitive federal accountability measures should be replaced by state and local systems for examining persistent school and district underperformance. Federal law should promote problem solving and the targeting of resources and interventions based on locally identified needs, rather than relying on rigid federal intervention strategies. This state and its locally-led approach will promote genuine and significant school and district improvement and would be better understood and embraced by local communities.

To be effective, a reauthorized ESEA must help states, regional agencies, and local districts by supporting school improvement systems, investing in best practices, and removing fear and blame. In Nebraska, where resources are scarce, we believe in leveraging our assets by inspiring intrinsic motivation to improve and by “showing up to help before we show up to criticize.”

### **Major Position Topics**

1. **Standards:** Content and performance standards are best designed -- as Nebraska has done for 17 years --at the state level with local stakeholder input. The new ESEA should call on states to develop and adopt college and career ready standards, but must not require the adoption of specific standards or related curriculum. Nebraska recently adopted revised English Language Arts Standards that all state postsecondary education systems declared college and career ready and the same process is being utilized for the revision of Mathematics. All state standards should address the career-ready expectations of Nebraska employers.

2. **Assessment and Accountability:** State accountability systems, as well as educators, should use the assessment results — national, state, and classroom-based — and other appropriate indicators to monitor school performance and to measure student achievement on college and career ready standards. Assessment and accountability systems must be balanced and appropriate for students. Therefore, the new ESEA must enable states to use multiple measures as well as statewide summative assessments as part of their accountability systems.

3. **Effective Educators and Leaders:** All students must be supported by effective teachers, and educator leaders. Educational Service Units, schools, and districts should develop effective teachers and education leaders who establish a culture of success. With broad input from stakeholders, the Nebraska State Board of Education established a Teacher/Principal Evaluation framework. The State Board is committed to partnering with postsecondary institutions, intermediate agencies, school districts, local teachers and leaders to increase capacity for educator professional development and effective support systems that institute effective instructional practices in all buildings and classrooms. The new ESEA should provide adequate resources and flexibility to enable states and school districts to invest in their educators and school leaders. Furthermore, the new law must not mandate a one-size-fits-all educator evaluation system.

4. **School Improvement:** Rather than requiring compliance with rigid school turnaround models that mandate staffing and other changes without reflecting on local circumstances and needs, the new ESEA should include support designed to ensure that our most vulnerable students have stable education environments as well as effective and supportive teachers and school building leaders. The new ESEA should call on states to have effective intervention strategies for persistently low-performing schools, but not mandate specific interventions.

5. **General Funding and Flexibility:** To truly build a strong education system nationwide, the new ESEA must allow states — based on their own state plans — to consolidate and transfer select federal funds to support state, regional, and local practices that enhance capacity for improvement rather than depleting capacity to meet regulatory demands. The new ESEA must be aligned to support high quality early learning systems that Nebraska is expanding.